

Impressions of Pioneers, of Alberta as a Ranching Country

Commencing
1881

BY
Duncan McEachran, L.L.D., D.V.S., F.R.C.V.S.
EMERITUS DEAN AND PROFESSOR FACULTY OF COMPARATIVE MEDICINE
McGILL UNIVERSITY
RESIDENCE
Ormsby Grange, Ormstown, Prov. of Quebec

Gift of
Mrs M.L. Cochrane
1960

Pm

636.08

M1412

In association with Senator M. H. Cochrane, Dr. McEachran organized The Cochrane Ranch of which the Senator was first President. Dr. McEachran was Vice-President and General Manager, till 1883, when he resigned to organize another large ranch of which Sir John Walrond was President and Doctor McEachran General Manager; subsequently becoming President and continued in that position till incapacitated by a serious surgical operation, he had to retire.

The Ranch for a number of years has been rented to Messrs. P. Burns Company, and is advertised for sale—including about 39,000 acres of free-hold land not excelled in Alberta for ranching and mixed farming purposes.



522

—

—

IMPRESSIONS OF PIONEERS OF ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

DUNCAN McEACHRAN, L. L. D., D. V. S., F. R. C. V. S.

The history of Stockraising in Alberta is of a very recent date. It may be truly said that up to the time of commencing the construction of the "Great Canadian National Highway", The Canadian Pacific Railway, 1881, no attempt had been made to introduce improved stock into that natural stock country. That year, however, marks the most important epoch in the history of what has now become an industry second to none in importance and soon to become one of large proportions.

The opening up of the vast country forming nearly half a continent by the construction of a railway through almost unknown regions, naturally led to inquiries as to the utility of the country. Varied reports were given as to climate, and resources, but in one thing all agreed, and that was that the country known as the "Foot Hills" of the Rocky Mountains, subsequently named Alberta, was the natural home of the great herds of wild cattle (the Buffalo) where they roamed in countless thousands, summer and winter, and where the Elk, the Antelope, and various species of game which followed in their wake abounded; where the native man was yet a savage living in the "Tepee" and supported only by the chase. The climate being such that, scantily clothed as he

was, he lived in comparative comfort himself, whilst his ponies found their own food during the entire year on the open prairie, without artificial shelter or food of any kind—nothing in fact but the natural grass "Bunch grass" ("Eriocoma Cuspidata"), which covers as a thick mat the whole of the foot-hill country.

When the writer visited Alberta first in 1881, the buffalo had disappeared, but unmistakable evidences of the vast herds which but recently covered the prairie were everywhere to be seen, the whole landscape being dotted here and there by bleaching bones. Residents of the country and officers of the Mounted Police informed us that the buffalo literally covered the country as far as the eye could see, and frequently it was found difficult to drive the teams so dense were they crowded. Captain W. I. Twining, Chief Astronomer and Surveyor on the United States Boundary Survey Commission in his report dated February 1877, says of the buffalo herds ranging north and south from the sweet Grass Hills, "This herd which ranges from the Missouri River north to the Saskatchewan made its appearance going south about the last of August, the number of animals is beyond estimation. Looking at the front of the herd from an

4. ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

elevation of 1,800 feet above the plain, I was unable to see the end in either direction.

Strange as it may seem the vast herd which was thus seen on its southward journey never again reappeared in that country, and nothing but the bleaching bones, the well worn trails, the buffalo wallows and, buffalo circles, remained to give credence to the extraordinary descriptions of what is now referred to as "the good old days of the buffalo".

Almost immediately after the transference of the North West Territories from the Hudson Bay to the Dominion of Canada the native cattle begun to disappear, and thus a large savage population of Indians, as savage as the buffalo himself were thrown on the hands of the Government destitute. For did they not subsist entirely on the Buffalo. For from him did they not derive their food, clothing, covering for their lodges, did not his dressed skins bring them both the necessities and luxuries, by trading with the white traders who followed their camps? In fact, when the country was full of Buffalo the Indian was happy and independent.

Here then was a condition of things requiring the most careful consideration and the display of the most cool judgment. A vast area of the land forming the foot hills of the Rockies extending from the base of the mountains eastward a hundred miles or more, and from the Boundary Line northward for three or four hundred. The soil of the heaviest black loam several feet deep, the natural grasses of the richest and most nutritious quality, which not only grew luxuriantly during summer, but, owing to the dryness of the climate, cure on their stalks and retain their nutritive qualities similar to hay

during the winter, a rich and valuable property surely yet at that date accessible only by long and difficult prairie journeys, not unattended by danger. Hence the Government found it necessary to make provision for the support of the Indians, they could not be allowed to starve; treaties had to be made with them, a Police Force organized and maintained for preserving order, and thus the Indians became the wards of the Government, who had to feed them and pay a small annual cash allowance not only for humanity's sake, but it was found to be much cheaper to feed them than to fight them.

At the time to which we aRude (1881) there was no railway within eight hundred miles of Fort McLeod, and the nearest telegraph was the United States Military Telegraph at Fort Shaw 180 miles away. The few whites who had penetrated so far into the Indian country were mostly engaged in trading with them, and a few of whom the best known was the late John Glen at Fish Creek were engaged in farming operations, which in consequence of the high prices of everything was highly remunerative. Oats were in demand at 8 cents per lb., Potatoes 5 cts. to 7 cts. per lb., Butter 75c to \$1.00 per lb., nearly everything was freighted from Fort Benton at 8 cents per lb., and all sorts of supplies and merchandise were accordingly high in prices. The current wages for labourers ranged from \$50 to \$70 with board which cost twenty more, hence the Old Timer made money and frequently spent it as fast as he made it. The whisky trader and gambling housekeeper too often were the only persons benefited by the high prices paid for hired help.

ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY 5

The white population from the Boundary Line to Calgary did not number one hundred exclusive of Mounted Police and Government officials and Surveyors.

The Indians on the other hand, nomadic tribes of savages, constituting a dangerous armed mob, numbering in the district named about 8,000, consisting of Blackfoot, Bloods, Peigans and Sarcees were a source of danger and well grounded anxiety, from their restless habits and unreliable dispositions, and as they had not yet realized the fact that now that the Buffalo was gone, they were entirely dependent on the Government for food.

This then was briefly the condition of things in 1881. The Government had on their hands a large territory, the climate of which was known to be mild enough for stock to feed out the whole year round. In which were only a very few white pioneers, venturesome spirits who had pushed westward beyond civilization taking their chances among the Indian tribes. These numbered over 8,000 and were as much savages as they had been five hundred years before, perhaps more so, armed too, not with obsolete weapons but with the most improved arms of precision obtainable by them, the Winchester and the Sharp.

The question with the Government was, what is best to do with this valuable territory? The Indians we must provide for, reserves must be set aside for them, of their own selection, but what is best to do with the vast area of rich pasture land remaining on our hands? Reports were ordered and received from Surveyors, Mounted

Police Officers and others who were in positions to know the country, and they all pointed to the supreme suitableness of the whole Foot-hill country for stock raising.

Knowing the great value of the rapidly growing live-stock trade to Canada, it being a well-known fact that for a series of years such was the depression in the carrying business that were it not for the exportation of live stock, many of the lines of steamers could not have continued to run (their entire fleet) more than a tithe of them ocean freight vessels.

Not only did the development of stock breeding in Canada enrich the agricultural community by direct return of money, but even more so by stimulating improvements in breeding, both in quality and numbers of the animals, as well as by necessitating the production of feeding stuffs on the farms, which directly led to better cultivation and the importation of corn, oil cake, cotton seed cake, and other fattening foods, whereby a larger quantity and better quality of manure found its way to the soil, in this way agriculture generally was both directly and indirectly benefited, and further in no more forcible way was Canada as a field for immigration brought to the notice of the British farmer, and the capitalist.

Being assured of this, and knowing that vast areas of agricultural lands, millions of acres of unoccupied land in fact, were to be found much nearer a market, and on the direct lines of a railway then in prospect, the Government of the day considered well the interest of the country, and deserve the greatest praise for adopting the only system whereby capital

6 ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

could be induced to be invested in developing the most valuable industry of Canada both present and prospective, the leasing of tracts of pasture lands to companies or individuals for stock raising on a large scale.

The first few years of stock-raising under what is known as the ranching system, were purely experimental, and though serious misfortunes overtook the Pioneer Company through inexperience, it did not alter the high opinion entertained of the country for stock-raising by the very few men who alone were the losers by the disaster referred to.

We will not refer further to individual concerns but proceed to describe for the benefit of our readers the system of stock-raising as followed in that rich grazing country, which forms the Foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains in the district of Alberta where we find companies owning herds of cattle ranging from 1,000 to 13,000 and bands of horses from 100 to 1,000 head, which practically may be said to run out the entire year finding their own food and shelter.

(Note) It is not the writer's intention to discuss the various pros and cons of the Lease System in this article but the above explanation is necessary to a proper understanding of the system of stock-raising as practised in Alberta.

A Cattle Ranch in the Early Eighties In Alberta.

Let our reader accompany us to the ranching country in the district known as the Macleod district. We leave the Canadian Pacific Railway at Dunmore and reach Lethbridge by the "Galt Railway" as the N.W.

Coal and Navigation Company's road is familiarly known. From Lethbridge we drive to Fort Macleod, twenty-nine miles, and this is our first day's experience in the ranching country.

The time of our visit is early in June. We start as soon as we have breakfast, say seven o'clock in the morning. What a glorious morning it is; we all exclaim as we feel exhilarated by the rare, dry, but cool and bracing air for are we not now over 3000 feet above the sea level? What a transparent atmosphere, what an expansive horizon. We descend from the plateau on which Lethbridge stands, cross on a ferry the rapid running Belly river ascending the steep incline on the opposite side we wend our way in a north-westerly direction across the open but undulating prairie. The grass, bunch grass, covers the soil in rich abundance but of a medium length, in every direction as far as the eye can reach grass covered prairie meets the view.

Small bands of cattle are here and there quietly grazing, some small lots are seen close to the trail; and so tame are they that we drive close up to them before they get up to scamper out of the way. We remark on the condition and quality of the stock, we observe that the cows show unmistakably their Texas Shorthorn crossing; we notice too, that many of the calves show Hereford bulls of the purest blood.

Is it possible, we ask, that these animals which look so well, so contented and happy have no food or shelter provided for them during the winter months? It is a fact, you are told.

We call at Kipp in passing where we are sure to meet with

ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY 7

one or more men of the order cowboy, or at least an "old timer" who is posted and you are sure to hear the following conversation.

"Well, Jim, what's the news? Have you heard anything of the Round Up?" "Yes. Pincher Creek outfit is working the cattle across the river near "Strong's bottom". Willon Creek outfit were at Jumbo Lakes night afore last, they're headin' down towards the mouth of Little Bow now, I guess." What about the calf crop?" "It's away up, the boys say the prairie is full of calves; there'll be a big branding this year, sure." "The stock business is promising well this summer, Jim?" "You bet it is," is Jim's confident reply and we drive on, musing and as we are inexperienced we accept in toto the confident statements made us, no doubt in good faith, but as we are not experienced we are aware that we will know better after the branding is over how the calf crop pans out. It is seldom that either the cow-boy or old-timer will discourage you. After passing a night at Macleod we start to visit one of the numerous cattle ranches within easy driving distance, Joe McFarlane's.

The ranch is the homestead, consisting usually of a small log house, with stable for eight or ten horses, corrals or fenced enclosures for branding, feeding and preserving hay for winter use.

Some large companies have several ranches on their range. The interior of their ranch is comfortable or otherwise, according to the taste or liberality of the responsible head. Some purposely do not make it home-like, the theory being that if the cowboy is made too comfortable he is not so apt to

rustle on the prairie. Others believe that if treated as men and civilized beings, well-fed, well-housed and fairly paid they are more apt to value their positions and give more faithful service to their employer.

We look around the outfit, and find that besides the accommodation above referred to, one or more wagons, saddles, mowing machines, rakes, branding irons, with minor tools and implements, make up the plant. As our visit has more to do with the cattle we accept the cow ponies placed at our service, and we are accompanied by the manager who is usually an experienced cow man, who has spent his life on the cow-trail, and is conversant with all the details of the business, knows every herd and their brands from here to Texas, and affords us a fund of valuable information as to the outs and ins of "cow-punching."

Summer and Winter Feeding.

We remark on the abundance and richness of the grass, which as we approach the mountains becomes more luxuriant, in most places like a hay meadow in fact, and ask how many acres of such grass are required to feed an animal all the year round? To which he replies:

"That will depend very much on what sort of a winter you have. Look," he says, "to the west, you see the mountains there about thirty miles off. Well, the nearer you get to them, till within a few miles, the longer and more luxuriant the grass becomes, and as you go eastward, for say seventy miles, it gradually becomes shorter, showing that the conditions favoring vegetation at some seasons of the year at least are most favorable

8 ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

close to the mountains. You, observe," he says, "that these foot-hills and adjoining prairies are covered with abundant grass, so abundant that were it available the whole year round there would be no reasonable limit to the number of cattle which could feed here, but don't forget that during winter snow falls often from eight to twelve inches, and the grass is covered in many places deeply and were it not for the strong winds which prevail here, blowing it off the westward slopes the stock would often fare badly. This must be considered in reckoning the feeding capacity of a country the year round. The filling up of the coulees also with snow prevents access to bare ground and good feed. The Government regulation of one animal to ten acres could not be carried out practically, during winter. Experience has taught that double that acreage is none too much. It is allowed on Texas, Wyoming and Montana ranges that from thirty to forty acres are required, during the winter half of the year.

Winter Feeding.

"What provision is made for winter on the Alberta ranges?" we queried.

On all well conducted ranges feeding corrals are built near the ranch, and hay in quantity varying according to the extent of the herd, is put up in hay corrals, not as you might at first suppose to be carried and distributed to the stock on the prairie or in sheltered places. The stock must be brought to the hay, for even if it could be hauled through snow drifts, the wind is often so strong as to blow the most of it away before it reaches its destination. The only practical plan is to bring in any poor

cattle, or young cows with big calves, when they are found showing need of care, and feed them till the bad weather is over, and the good manager will not trust to luck with his fall calves which should be weaned and kept within easy access or in a large fold where they can be easily driven to hay when required. Without this provision, a very small percentage of fall calves live to be counted in the spring.

Of course, domestic bred pedigree bulls will also be looked after and fed if necessary during winter storms. Feeding on a large scale is not practical, so long as the ranching system is followed, not only on account of the cost of so much pitch-forking of hay, but the difficulties attending it, and the danger of teaching the stock to look for feed being given them instead of rustling for themselves. It is necessary, however, when there is not any snow to make drinking holes in the ice, usually, however, there is sufficient snow taken up with the grass to quench their thirst and render water less important.

It is necessary to stop all working or disturbance of the cattle as soon as the fall round up is over, so as to allow them to locate for the winter. They, like the feral animals will find their haunts, and associates, have their sleeping places, as well as favorite drinking springs or streams.

It is necessary to see that they are well scattered before winter sets in, and to scatter them if they show a tendency to bunch together.

Winter Losses.

If we take an average of the years we will be near the mark on a properly conducted ranch, if we put the winter losses down at

ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY 9

about 5%. Some years they will not exceed 2 per cent but we may count on a severe winter once in five years which will run the death rate up to 10, 15, or even 25%.

The great risk of winter losses is due to crowding of the cattle together and the persistency with which they will travel with storms. Thus when a severe storm comes on they will turn their tails to the blast and move on with it mile after mile, on and on they go, so long as the storm lasts, often 10, 15 or 20 miles during a single storm, away from their haunts, separated often from their associates, the calf from its mother, hungry, fatigued, perhaps footsore, stopped by a fence against which they crowd, they stand with backs up, heads down, give up entirely and perish in their tracks.

It is in these storms too, that the spring calves are lost. Cut off from their mothers, they die of hunger and fatigue, and the mother too, is often lost in consequence of her udder swelling, becoming inflamed, then frozen and leading to the death of the poor animal. Much therefore, depends on the activity and interest in their work displayed by the cowboys, not during, but immediately after a storm. Sometimes a bunch of cattle are hemmed in by deep snow in the coulees, which requires a path to be tramped down by the man for himself and horse. Many a cow and a calf if driven in, sheltered and fed for a few days would live and do well, but unassisted they die.

The Round-up.

The "round-up" is the term to signify the time at which the cattle are gathered all over the range, by the representatives of the owners of the various brands. It is usual to commence rounding up about the first of June, when cowboys

proportionate to the numbers of cattle, each provided with three horses meet at a given point. Large ranches send their own outfit, smaller ones either club together or get their men boarded with one of the large ones.

A round-up outfit consists of a mess wagon, and a baggage wagon which is usually attached by the trail to the other one, a mess tent and a sleeping tent, camp stove, cooking utensils, tin plates, knives and forks, etc. The saddle horses of each outfit are usually herded by a man for night herding and another for day herding. The cook and night herder usually change camp under direction of the Captain of the round up, and drive the teams. On the round up the cooks vie with one another as to who will have "grub piled" earliest, and the result is that breakfast is usually about four o'clock in the morning.

As soon as breakfast is over the horse herder brings in the horse band and horses are caught, saddled, and mounted in a short space of time, and this is the hour of chaff and fun for the boys. Imagine sixty or eighty mounted men of all ages, countries and dispositions in a large round up, mounted on the veritable cow-pony, many of them unbroken "bronchos" which buck, rear, plunge and in such a manner as to require both nerve and tact to carry out the suggestion so freely shouted to the rider, "stay with him, Jim," "hang and rattle, old man," while he bounds and twists in the air in a fashion not easy to describe, and less easy to experience. All mounted meet on a plateau and here the Captain of the round-up, (usually selected for his knowledge and experience of the business and the brands) if he is the right sort of a man he will handle the round-up like a military

10 ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

camp and makes his arrangements for the day. He selects the most experienced men, and places under each a proportionate number of men whom he sends off in all directions like the spokes of a wheel with instructions to go certain distances and gather in the cattle to a place agreed upon. Thus the camp is deserted by all, save the cooks, horse wranglers and an old man or two who are extra or have met with accidents.

In about three or four hours cattle begin to appear in bunches, large or small, being driven from all directions till converging to one point they all are rounded up together, from 1,000 to 2,000 head.

A certain number of men are now detailed to "hold them", that is, to ride part of a circle, keeping the cattle together and preventing any from escaping. Others are detailed in twos to "cut out." This part of the work requires specially trained horses, which, to see working gives the lover of horse flesh great delight. A good "cut out horse" is of incalculable value, as, once he recognizes the special animal wanted out he will follow it, dodge as it will, he twists and turns, keeping not only his eye on it but his muzzle close to its quarter, cautiously, but determinedly, till driven to the outer line of the dense circle of cattle he at a given sign from the rider dashes full gallop at the animal and sends it running to join the cut herd, which is being held by men from the ranch or district to which the brand belongs. The work is more quickly and more satisfactorily done by two men working in consort. In this way the different brands are separated, and driven off to their own ranges for calf

branding. Camp is moved daily, though sometimes remaining two days in one place, the camps being usually about ten or twelve miles apart. In this way the whole of the cattle districts are worked. At the termination of the round-up any yearlings or older cattle which are found without a brand or mark of ownership are sold by auction to the highest bidder, usually the Captain acting as auctioneer, the proceeds going to the general fund of the association. *

Immediately after the general round-up, the calf branding round-up is conducted by each company by their own men and horses, at their own corrals. The herd is again rounded up and cows and calves are "cut out." Care is necessary to keep mother and calf together, and herein an experienced cowboy excels the novice in "spotting" the mother and her calf; errors in this will give rise to endless trouble.

The cows and calves are now driven to the corral and the gate closed, after the ropers, usually two, with their horses are admitted. These men are specialists in their way. The work is to catch the calves by means of the lasso in the throwing of which they become very expert. The horses too are specialists, and show wonderful intelligence in the performance of their work. Many of them recognize at once a successful throw of the rope and brace themselves accordingly, and some of them can be trusted to hold a calf keeping the rope tight while the rider seizes

*Note—These are known as "Mavericks" from a rustler named Maverick, who, during the American war stayed at home and made good use of his branding iron, and thus became the owner of a large herd.

ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY 11

the calf; good rope horses are often of high value. The calf thus seized is dragged out from the cows, seized by the calf wrestlers, thrown down on his side, when large and strong, a task sometimes not easy of performance, and held down while he is castrated and branded.

The sexes as a rule run with remarkable regularity in all herds about equal-in-point-of-numbers. A proportion of the best bull calves is kept for bulls, although it cannot be doubted that harm is often done by in-breeding. Where fresh blood is from time to time introduced, however, no serious results seem to follow the practice, and at this early day was excusable owing to the expense and difficulties in obtaining young bulls.

Number of Calves.

It is customary to compute the number of calves at about 25% of the entire herd, thus a herd of 10,000 would give 2,500. In Alberta the calf crop varies some years as high as 65 per cent. of breeding females, at others as low as 50 per cent., no doubt the percentage of calves is greatly reduced by winter and especially by spring storms, wolves, and cattle thieves, and in many cases by an insufficiency of bulls.

Number of Bulls.

Usually the large outfits have plenty of bulls but it is too common a practice for the smaller men to put little or no money in bulls trusting to have the services of those of their wealthier neighbours, and in this way both are damaged. Six bulls to 100 cows is considered sufficient, and if every owner would furnish that number the calf crop would be larger without doubt.

Domestic bred barn fed bulls are not satisfactory, they do not rustle like the range bred bulls, and they are too apt to make a run for the ranch when anything disturbs them, be it a storm in winter or flies in summer. The best bulls are those bred on the range under

ranging conditions. On some of the ranches, pedigreed cows and bulls are kept for breeding bulls to turn loose as weanlings. They learn to rustle and never know anything about the feeding trough or artificial food of any kind.

The Profits of Cattle Ranching.

Numerous publications such as the "Beef Bonanza" furnish their readers with tables of calculations of the growth-and-profits-of-a-cattle-ranch which like all paper operations are very delusive. In no other business does management play so important a part, and a ranch will be profitable or otherwise just in proportion to the goodness or badness of the management.

It is true that no management can control the elements, but a good manager will make common sense provision for contingencies likely to occur, he will, keep down expenses to a reasonable amount and attend to the minute details which generally constitute the leakages by which profits disappear.

To make a ranch profitable it is necessary to have a moderately sized herd. Thus a herd of 10,000 head will be proportionately more profitable than one of 3,000. For instance, each requires the same outlay in house, corrals, stables, waggons, mowers, rakes, etc., and except during the "round up" only one or two more men, yet the cash returns from the sale of steers will be three and a third times as much and the increase of calves correspondingly larger.

The sale of beef steers from the small concern does not much exceed the expenses for wages, supplies, etc., and certainly leaves little after paying for hay, bulls and necessary improvements, for it must be remembered that in a growing ranch, the she calves are retained for breeding, the steer calves only being brought to market.

12 ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

It is evident therefore that for the manager to make a favourable showing to his share-holders the herd should be sufficiently large to give considerable returns over and above the actual expenditure.

The first two years at least should be given to organization, unless indeed a herd near at hand is procurable, with steers in it of two and three years old, and if it is desirable to obtain the full profits from the concern the entire herd should be purchased at once, so that the full steer crop of each successive year as they mature, can be sold.

In nearly every other business, the stock, and necessary plant are purchased out of capital, and the full produce converted into money for expenses and dividends, in ranching this is seldom done. The range is usually less than half stocked, the females are kept to breed and increase the herd, 6 males to 100 females are kept for bulls, thus leaving only 44% of steers which have to pay not only the expenses but often the improvements as well and shareholders do not receive the profits which the schedules of profits in books are led him to expect. At the same time his unrealized profits are increasing and were a sale of the entire outfit to be made it would be found that considerable money had been made in a few years.

The Cow Boys.

Who are they? Is often asked, and as it is often answered in a manner which entirely misrepresents the class we will reply to the query.

The cowboys are a distinctive class, men whose parents were pioneers in the far west, traders perhaps among Indians or at military outposts, or else venturesome immigrants from the western states. The cattle business on wholesale principles was first and is still most extensively carried on in Texas, next Wyoming, Colorado, Mon-

tana, Dakota, Idaho, and more recently in New Mexico, Oregon and Washington Territories, and were born on the cow trail and have never learned anything in the way of business but to ride and handle stock.

Among them too are to be found men, who, attracted to the wild west, have left their homes in the east or in England, have thrown their education aside preferring the wild freedom and roaming life of the cowboy to the more luxurious but conventional life of eastern civilization.

As a whole the cowboy is a genial whole-souled fellow, generous to a fault, honorable and trustworthy and loyal to his employer in a remarkable degree. In many ways he resembles Jack the sailor, for the greater part of his time he is isolated from all society except that of his fellows on the range, he spends his days in the saddle, and his employment calls for courage and endurance such as few callings require. They are expert horsemen and wonderful feats of horsemanship can daily be witnessed among them. They work hard, have many hardships, get well paid but seldom save money, too often, like Jack, when his ship is paid off they gamble and drink their entire earnings, as they express it "blow it in" till not a cent is left, and return to work again for more. In debts of honor a cowboy never fails to pay as soon as he can earn enough, and their promptitude in paying their debts should be an example to more favored eastern men. He seldom marries, his life and surroundings are not compatible with domestic encumbrances. This was our experience at the beginning of our venture in Alberta.

The Cowboy, The Newspaper And Novel Writers.

The cowboy of the newspaper and the novel writer is a fraud, he is usually a good for nothing eastern black sheep, who will do no good anywhere, is either not wanted or else

ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY 13

very much wanted by the officers of the law, at home, and therefore armed with a six-shooter, bowie knife, and the usual paraphernalia of the "bad man" he migrates to the far west where he indulges in all his wild extravagances, "goes broke", perhaps becomes a horse thief and consequently an outlaw. Such men sometimes take temporary employment as "cow punchers" when men are scarce. Thus they get the name of cow boy and all their wild extravagances, often murdering and plundering, are credited to the cowboys. Never were a respectable body of men more maligned than the hard working, manly fellows who are to be found at work on properly conducted cattle ranches.

Alberta as a Ranching Country.

It is no exaggeration to say that the sun does not shine on a country better adapted to stockraising, on a large scale, than Alberta. Spring is early and usually mild, summer is never very hot, it is always cool, even cold at night. The rain fall is such as to insure abundance of grass while running streams and never failing springs abound everywhere in the foot-hills and on the open prairie, lakes and marshes afford ample water at all seasons excepting winter when they were frozen over for a short time. There are few ranges on which natural hay can be cut abundantly and none on which most of the cultivated grasses cannot be grown under a simple system of irrigation. Since these facts were written in the eighties, this district suffered as elsewhere, from a severe drought. Yet in 1914-15 enormous crops of wheat have been grown and marketed, 50 bushels to the acre in several years, and over large acreages throughout Alberta. The whole district is said to be a vast coal bed, many of the companies burn nothing but coal obtained from seams which crop up on the banks of streams and coulees. Building and fencing timber can be found on all foothill ranges, and prai-

rie ranges can be supplied either by hauling it some distance or having it floated down one of the numerous streams which abound in that country.

Market For Steers.

Until 1887 the home consumption of feeding the Indians, Mounted Police, etc., left no beef for export. That year, however, about 1500 head were shipped to Britain and in 1888 there were about 4000 surplus steers most of which were exported to the Glasgow and London market. The prices paid by the dealers for cattle delivered at the railway was \$50.00 to \$55.00 per head and such was the quality of the cattle that a fair margin of profit was left to the middle men after carrying them nearly 6,000 miles by railway and steamship.

It is worthy of remark that these cattle although born on the prairies never being under cover or receiving artificial food, lose comparatively little in weight during transportation and take to feed and water readily and the few which were fed in Scotland proved highly satisfactory.

There are about 8,000 Blackfeet, Bloods, Piegan, Stonies and Sacress in Alberta, who receive one and a quarter lbs. of beef per day for every man, woman and child which is paid for by the Government in accordance with the treaties made with tribes in 1887. The contracts are awarded by the Indian Department at Ottawa, and are filled by the ranches; meantime this is the only market open to them.

Horse Breeding In Alberta.

Profitable as cattle raising under proper management can be, made in Alberta, the breeding of horses can be made much more profitable, and much valuable pasturage too much covered by snow during winter for cattle will carry horses safely. Cattle will not paw the snow with their feet while horses

14 ALBERTA AS A RANCHING COUNTRY

will, and horses will be found fat while cattle die of starvation. In the country where they can find food out of doors the whole year round the cost of raising horses is very small and when the class of horse is bred which is in demand the profits must be large. The first herds brought into the country were mixed bands from Montana, Oregon, Washington Territory and British Columbia.

Lately mares have been imported from Ireland and in large numbers heavy draught mares from Ontario and Quebec.

Thoroughbred stallions of the purest blood and of the highest points of excellence, Norfolk trotters, English carriage horses, Shires, Clydes, Percherons Canadian and American trotters, have been selected, imported and judiciously mated as they will be the result must be that in a few years Alberta will be able to supply an enormous number of the finest horses to be obtained anywhere.

Born on the prairie their mothers having an unlimited supply of nutritious grass, the foal is nursed abundantly from the first and never knows stint of food. The freedom of its life, the constant exercise in the open air, develops in a remarkable degree, feet, limbs, muscles and lungs. The development of the entire body is more complete, the form far more symmetrical, the senses more acute and the animal a decided improvement on his less fortunate fellow who is bred and raised in domestication, tied to a stake for days,

weeks or months in many cases irregularly fed and watered, seldom allowed to extend his limbs or fill his lungs by a gallop.

'It needs no prophesy to foresee an immense and remunerative trade in horses of all descriptions being developed in Alberta and hunters, hacks, carriage, army and draught horses, of all descriptions being exported to all markets.

The one drawback to horse raising is the length of time that must elapse (about five years) before there is any of the produce marketable, but that time over horse raising in a large scale must be very profitable.

To make it so, however, the proper kind must be bred and they must be properly handled from colthood and brought to market free from vice and blemish and thoroughly broken and this can only be done by experienced men. This industry, like most others, suffered by the war and its development stopped for want of a market; but the opinions above expressed will in a few years be found to be correct.

Conclusion.

Our readers could enjoy no pleasanter holiday trip than to visit this great grazing country which is to the writer's mind one of the richest inheritances of British people. The facilities offered by the ocean steamers and the railway system of Canada are such as to make travelling a luxury and we are convinced that visitors will endorse fully the statements made in the foregoing pages.